

# THE BOSTON INFORMER

No. 114

*The truly highbrow rag for people who can read...April Fools issue*

April 1, 2015

## Boston Catches Olympics Fever!

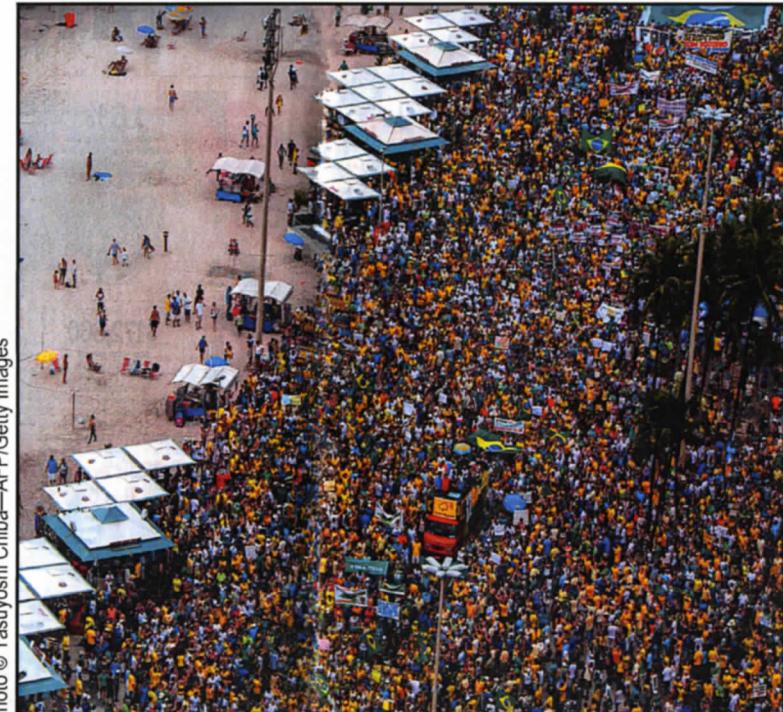


Photo © Yasuyoshi Chiba—AFP/Getty Images

Dorchester Bay at the L Street Bathhouse drew enormous crowds just to watch officials install buoys for the Olympic triathlon. The City agreed to install two more Hubway stations for the triathlon crowds.

### Olympics 2024 triathlon

—A unique Boston twist will combine the Cultural Olympiad (required by Olympic Charter) and the athletic competition. Celebrating Boston's heritage and culture, the triathlon will start in Dorchester Bay in South Boston with a swim with L Street Brownies. Competitors will cycle from Dewey Square to Charles Circle at rush hour (time penalties assessed for stopping at red lights and hitting pedestrians). In the final event, participants will run to catch an MBTA bus (of course, the bus will never stop).

The modern pentathlon/Cultural Olympiad will include:

- Navigate the MBTA system to get to the Wynn Casino in Everett with \$100 in chips;
- Jump on Wynn's ferry and ride to BU Rowing Center via the Charles Dam at the Museum of Science;
- Hubway bike to Prudential Center via Kenmore Square after a Red Sox game;
- Stair-climb up and down the 52 stories at the Prudential Center (Voss Artesian water station at Top of the Hub);
- The final leg puts the competitor in a paddle boat down the Charles and back to L Street via the ICA where competitors must explain the art using sign language.

Each winner gets three tickets to the Duck Boat parade to be held on a not-yet-named section of Route 2 between Routes 495 and 128 in order to spread out the final events.

### Mini-Venues Seal Boston 2024 Deal

Boston 2024's planning principle, "Compact Games in a Compact City," is more than just a slogan. Boston 2024 leaders are working hard to convince the International Olympic Committee to introduce new competitions to the 2024 Games. Of particular interest to Boston 2024 moguls are events that have a small footprint. Struggling to find venues for mountain biking, steeplechase and canoe slalom, the brains behind Boston 2024 are pitching new events that not only require little space, but also celebrate the egghead brain power of the Boston area.

- Harvard and MIT are offering **short courses of up to 30 minutes** to see how rapidly athletes can learn. Of course speed reading is one of the courses as is meal preparation in 15 minutes or less.
- **Miniature golf** is a no-brainer per the Olympic committee

and courses are sprouting in many Boston neighborhoods.

- **Segway races** within the State House have been suggested and might wake up some of the occupants at the building.
- **Two slow and small events** are proposed: watching paint dry and watching grass grow. While these are not huge spectator sports, they do involve minimal skills but much training in identifying the start and finish points.
- **Speed texting** has a huge following among pre-teens and the college set. Plans to have competitors walking and navigating traffic in Copley Square were scrapped for safety reasons after WalkBoston pointed out it was dumb.
- **Double-Dutch jump roping**, now a college major at many Massachusetts institutions, is an acrobatic event requiring only two ropes and a soft surface.



# Movies Not to Miss!

**Run All Night** – A fantasy film about the MBTA having 24-hour service financed by a tax on corporate contributions to politicians.

**The Lazarus Effect** – Graphic demonstration of how the prospect of a new election brings apparently dead Congressmen back to life.

**Wild Tales** – Peoples' stories from the Arctic waters of Boston during the winter of 2015.

**The Theory of Everything** – A convincing proof that the basis of the Universe is Murphy's Law.

**What We Do in the Shadows** – An exposé of the workings of the Boston 2024 Olympic Games committee.

**Fifty Shades of Grey** – A study of the range of politician's campaign lies, from "white" to "black."

**The Imitation Game** – A review of how many proposed "new" ideas for improving infrastructure or reforming government agencies actually come from existing programs in other states or countries.

**Unfinished Business** – The story of the countless studies and recommendations on how to reform the MBTA and make it solvent,



## City Hall Plaza Ideas Competition Redux

Mayor Walsh's Request for Ideas, Interest and Innovation (RFI<sup>3</sup>) to transform City Hall Plaza has generated dozens of ideas. Excitement about making change at City Hall Plaza must be coming from Twitter-happy under-30-year-olds who were in diapers when Mayor Menino started the perennial discussions for the Plaza 20 years ago. Anyway, to address Mayor Walsh's Vision for City Hall Plaza ("inviting and attractive"; should attract people to spend time "relaxing, watching entertainment, participating in educational or cultural activities, enjoying their lunch..."), ideas have been all over the map, from dozens of pinball and air hockey machines to treadmills and stationary bikes that power laptops to rows and rows of benches and chairs with built in plugs to built-in yoga mats.

The Mayor's wish list is a lot to fit into about 3 acres after circulation and security constraints are accounted for. An idea submitted by the Plastic Pipe and Fittings Association maximizes the available space, creating multiple levels that twist and turn and could even be installed in a way to mask the new giant, out of scale MBTA Government Center headhouse. Send ideas until May 4 to @marty\_walsh using #CityHallPlaza.



## High-density Response to Walsh Housing Plan for 2030

Mayor Walsh's recent "Housing for a Changing City: Boston 2030" identified the need for 53,000 new units plus 16,000 dorm beds over 15 years. The plan states Boston's population will be 700,000 by 2030 and estimates 20 percent will be of retirement age, a big increase over today. The plan estimates huge numbers of young people living in Boston in 2030, mostly renting and not buying houses because they never learned how to mow a lawn. These demographics come together nicely, and coupled with a commitment to cutting red tape and providing zoning relief over the phone, may produce many units.

A developer has already proposed a quick solution to the housing crisis—stack existing buildings with new high-rises.

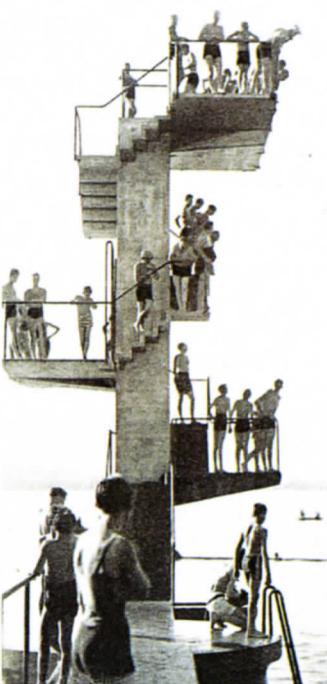


## Greenway Expands Programming

The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy, responding to chatter at the MassDOT ramp parcels study meeting about how to cover or screen some of the Central Artery ramps on the Greenway, has proposed a viewing platform for Parcel 12, a tiny bit higher than mentioned at the meetings.

Conservancy Executive Director Jolly Brackenberry said the proposed viewing platform might be considered "dumb" by some who fear kids will jump off.

However, he said it would be built in accordance with MassDOT's Healthy Transportation Policy Directive and GreenDOT standards, so it will be fine.



## Headlines You'll Never Read

- ✓ Governor Baker meets all heads of State agencies
- ✓ Mayor Walsh reads Boston 2024 fine print
- ✓ Mass. Legislature takes back the Big Dig debt it piled onto MBTA.
- ✓ Governor Baker reads previous reports on MBTA while awaiting latest
- ✓ Dudley Square merchants safe from displacement
- ✓ Keno parlors disappear in Downtown Crossing with Tower completion
- ✓ Legislature decries loss of gas-tax indexing; passes major gas tax increase

## MBTA Prepares 2015 Snow Plan

The MBTA's phones have been ringing off the hook as colleagues across the country offered tips on how to avoid the problems that crippled transit system in January and February. "Peer reviews" from New York, Hawaii, Tampa and San Diego provided a mixed bag of recommendations, said interim GM Frank DeLightful. He said the most common recommendation was to make sure to keep the air conditioning units well dusted, for some reason.



Other suggestions included running special vehicles to clear snow, instead of trains with plows; buying some snow shovels; check the Old Farmer's Almanac in September; and stock up on sweaters suitable for press conferences.

DeLightful said he would acting on a few long lead-time recommendations immediately. One is the purchase of backup high-traction wheels (pictured), available cheap from Manchuria.

In addition, the MBTA will again use helicopters as needed. It successfully rescued scores of stranded Green Line

passengers in February.

The MBTA will contract with Hanscom Field helicopter pilots to shuttle MBTA passengers (only those with Zone 8 passes) to the downtown heliport.



## What's Up?

**Northern Avenue Bridge** As reported just two days ago in The Boston Informer, Boston wants a cheap solution to replace the Northern Avenue Bridge. Ignored for decades (like the North Washington Street Bridge and Long Island Bridge) the Northern Avenue Bridge needs to be replaced. Some wags think opening it to traffic again will solve all the traffic problems in the Seaport District (not true; three more Hubway stations is the solution to traffic woes).

Anyway, noted engineer Rogers Chan proposed a bridge pioneered India made of roots. Lasts 500 years and is compliant with Greenovate Boston and GreenDOT. Chan observed this would address concerns about long-term maintenance costs. Mayor Walsh is said to be considering it.



## BRA Planning Division Review Leaked

A soon-to-be released three-month study of the Boston Redevelopment Authority's planning division was leaked to The Boston Informer. The consultant's scope was to focus on four areas, from organizational issues to helping with a visioning process for a master plan. However, the final report reveals that consultant Mickie and Company spent two-thirds of its time looking for the BRA's planning staff and the professional planners assigned to it.

The report includes a summary of the history of the BRA's planning division, from its heyday in the 1960s when hundreds of planners and urban designers actually did the work, to the Flynn-Menino era when the planning staff was decimated in favor of development reviewers. Mickie and Company recommend hiring planners from academic planning programs (there are a few in the Boston area) and hanging a sign in the BRA, "Planning Division: Make No Little Plans."

## Governor Baker to Sell Transportation Building

To provide income to cover the upcoming state debt, an unnamed developer is planning and negotiating (has a deal) to purchase the State Transportation Building in Park Square. Word on the street is the building will be adaptively reused as a hotel. Governor Baker had previously expressed concern about the public's lack of involvement in the deal when former Governor Patrick proposed the sale in his waning days. The waiting period is over. For amenities, the building already has more than one pool in the basement which is used for the HVAC systems. Smaller than the W Hotel across the street, building height should not be an issue. Mayor Walsh is in favor if Union labor will be utilized. Most of the hotel units will be on the small size in order to be used as "affordable" time-sharing units with communal kitchens and baths. Some will have multiple bedrooms which can be rented separately. With the hotel boom continuing, a 50-story tower is not inconceivable. The BRA is already in favor and a Board vote is being drafted with the particulars (height, FAR, zoning, plans, etc.) to be filled in prior to the hearing.

## Hub Ticket Saga Continues

The Boston Informer's favorite non-project, redevelopment of the former Hub Ticket in the Theater District, is morphing again. Micro hotel rooms are proposed this time. The developer was designated in 2007. No fooling.

# THE BOSTON INFORMER

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## Welcome to The Boston MisInformer,

the annual April Fool's issue of The Boston Informer, an otherwise "serious" newsletter covering development, construction and transportation downtown.

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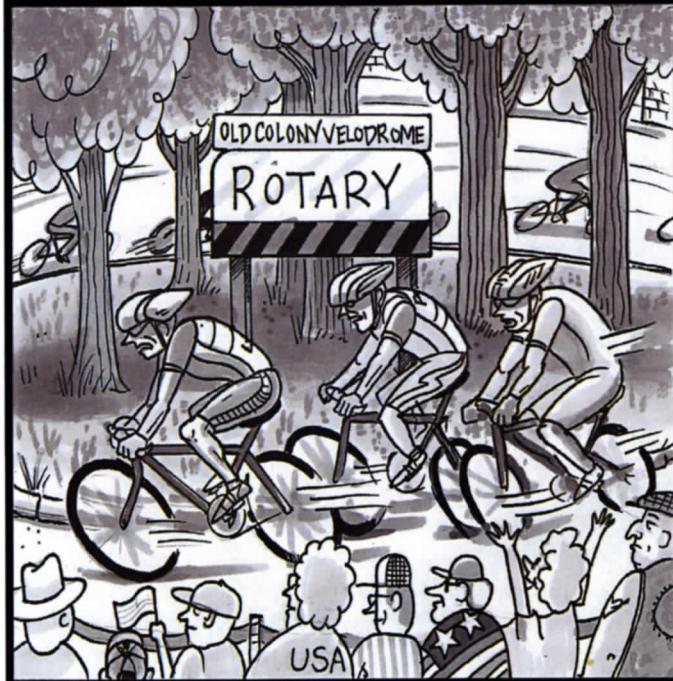
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*Boston 2024's bid for the Olympic Games touts the ability for a 'walkable, sustainable' event because of its wealth of existing facilities. Boston's unique rotaries offer interesting possibilities...*



**Boston 2024's cycling venue  
(and if a bike breaks down there's  
a Hubway nearby)**



**Library**

**Boston Architectural College**

## You Were Asking

**Q.** I'm visiting Boston and bought a Big Apple Circus ticket and went inside the building and it was the funniest show I'd ever seen. Juggling budgets, lots of clowns, uniforms and noise. Was I supposed to be outside on City Hall Plaza?

**A.** Either way, it's a circus.

**Q.** I understood Boston Olympics boosters say no public money will be spent for the 2024 Games if Boston gets the nod. Isn't the \$250,000 the State is going to pay a consultant to review the efficacy of the Games for Boston using public funds?

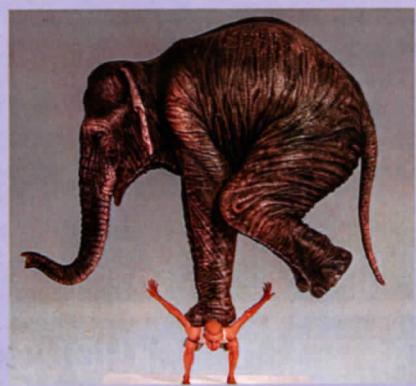
**A.** Good question.

**Q.** Hah, hah. I thought the Winter Informer was your April Fools issue with the "New Day for BRA" headline.

**A.** You know us too well. Fact is, every day is a new day for everyone. Note we did say basically the Authority was patting itself on the back with, "BRA Director Brian Golden lauds changes and reforms..."

**Q.** Trust me, I am "politically correct," but I am distressed that Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus will stop using elephants in its shows. What will become of the cute elephants?

**A.** Taking another crack at fixing City Hall plaza, Mayor Walsh is rumored to want the theme for the plaza to relate to fitness. The retired pachyderms would provide a challenge for aspiring athletes. The vast wasteland of City Hall Plaza would be a fine place for the elephants to roam around. Just lock up the farmers market goods.



No elephants were harmed in making this picture. Don't know about the man.

**Q.** I understand Mayor Walsh assigned a commission to study affordable housing opportunities for Boston. Has the commission developed any new approaches?

**A.** Yes. Strategies include contracting with Airbnb for apartments on a half-day schedule to maximize day and night usage. Hourly and daily rates are also available as are furnished and unfurnished units. Also on the table is renting MBTA buses which are generally empty on some runs and overnight. For families, buses can be refitted quickly (15 minutes or less) into quite large mobile homes. The State House is also not used heavily in off hours and some spaces are quite livable.